

By Sarah Mac Donald

<http://www.archons.org/news/detail.asp?id=406>

The 2010 report of the **US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF)** points out that "the Turkish Government's attempt to control religion and its effort to exclude religion from the public sphere based on its interpretation of secularism result in serious religious freedom violations for many of the country's citizens, including members of majority and, especially; minority religious communities.

Since 2002 the government of the Islamist leaning AKP has made a series of radical reforms and legal adjustments in an effort to bring Turkey into line with EU democratic norms and enhance the country's accession chances. Many of these changes are resented by those who cleave to the ideology that has held sway since the foundation of Turkey as a modern secular republic in 1923 under Kemal Ataturk. Traditionally the military has upheld its core tenets of conservative nationalism and strict secularism. For them the AKP is anathema to Turkey's much vaunted separation of Church and State. Some believe these forces lie behind a spate of attacks on Christians, most recently the stabbing to death of Turkey's most senior cleric, Bishop Luigi Padovese of Anatolia. His driver, Murat Altun, launched a frenzied knife attack on the bishop inside the Episcopal residence, and neighbours heard him shouting "Allah Akbar! I have killed the great Satan!"